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AUTHOR Stallworth, John T.; Williams, David L., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

Summarized in this report is a study designed to explore the attitudes of parents of elementary school children towards parent involvement in various school activities. Working with both the state and local PTA in six states, project staff distributed a questionnaire asking parents about their attitudes toward parent involvement, their interest in certain parent involvement roles, their interest in taking part in school decisions, and their actual participation in certain parent involvement activities. Parents were also asked about suggestions to improve their involvement and queried as to why parent involvement decreases at the high school level. Results from 2,083 returned questionnaires, presented in tabular as well as text form, suggested that respondents have a generally favorable attitude toward many types of parent involvement activities and are very interested in participating in school decisions as well as in supporting school activities and tutoring their own children at home. Parents reported a moderate level of participation in activities related to home tutoring and to support of school events, along with a very low level of participation in those activities related to school decision making. (MP)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE FINAL REPORT:

A SURVEY OF PARENTS REGARDING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

Prepared by

John T. Stallworth, Ph.D.

and

David L. Williams, Jr., Ed.D.

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION PROJECT
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DIVISION OF FAMILY, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY STUDIES
David L. Williams, Jr., Director

Preston C. Kronkosky, Executive Director
Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL)
Austin, Texas

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INTRODUCTION

Parent involvement in education can play an important part in improving children's success in school. Parents as well as school staff play an active role in educating children. However, parents and school staff have often been reluctant to work together cooperatively as partners in public education. The attitudes of both groups toward parent involvement are an issue which must be faced before dealing with other issues related to parent involvement.

Although recent studies have looked at issues related to certain types of parent involvement, none have focused on providing information about the attitudes of parents and school staff towards parent involvement in general and towards specific parent involvement activities.

This project was designed to gather information about parent involvement attitudes, as well as current practices, from educators and parents. The purpose of the project was then to use this information base to develop a parent involvement training curriculum for school staff.

During the first two years of this five-year study, project staff gathered information from elementary teachers, principals, and teacher educators in a six-state region regarding parent involvement. In this the third year, information has been gathered from parents with children attending elementary schools.

Working with both the state and local PTA, project staff distributed a questionnaire which asked parents about their attitudes toward parent involvement, their interest in certain parent involvement roles, their interest in taking part in school decisions, and their actual participation in certain parent involvement activities. They were also asked about suggestions to improve parent involvement and were asked why parent involvement decreases at the high school level.

Results suggested that parents have a generally favorable attitude toward many types of parent involvement activities. They were very interested in participating in school decisions, as well as supporting school activities and tutoring their own children at home. They reported a moderate level of participation in activities related to home tutoring and to supporting school events, and a very low level of participation in those activities related to school decision making.

The findings suggest that parent attitudes are not a major barrier to most types of parent involvement. Future research should ask whether the difference between their stated interest in decision making and their low level of participation in these kinds of activities may be related to lack of opportunity in the schools or to other factors.

METHODOLOGY

1. Description of Subjects

The participants in this survey consisted of parents in the SEDL six-state region who had at least one child in a public elementary school. The six states are Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. Local sites in each state were selected so that there would be equal representation across urban and rural areas in each state.

2. Description of Instrument

The Parent Involvement Questionnaire (PIQ) was used as the survey instrument for both the written and telephone survey. The instrument was a revision of one which was used previously in surveys of teacher educators, teachers and principals. We obtained and used suggestions regarding content and format from state and local PTA representatives, U.S. Education Department staff, and several experts in the area of parent involvement.

The questionnaire, designed to gather information from PTA parents, had seven parts. Part I contained 18 general parent involvement statements; parents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each. Part II listed 15 parent involvement decisions and asked parents to indicate their level of interest in being involved with them. Part III described seven parent involvement roles and parents had to indicate their level of interest in playing each role.

Part IV contained 24 parent involvement activities and asked parents how much they participate in such events. Ten suggestions for improving parent involvement were offered in Part V, which gave parents a chance to tell how well they thought each would work to increase parent involvement in schools. Part VI listed 10 reasons why parents become less involved in children's education at the high school level. Parents were asked to indicate how much they agreed with these reasons. Part VII was made up of 15 items which asked parents about themselves and their families.

The telephone survey instrument was a shorter version of the PIQ.

3. Data Collection

Working with state PTA presidents and local PTA officers, project staff identified a contact person at each of the 72 sites selected. After two telephone conversations explaining both the survey's purpose and the way we wanted to gather the questionnaire information, a follow-up letter was sent to each site person. This was usually the local PTA president.

4. Data Analysis

A total of 2,083 questionnaires were returned. The results were first analyzed to (1) provide an overall picture of responses to the survey, (2) get a complete description of parents' characteristics, and (3) plan for other analyses which needed to be done. The first analysis described how parents responded as a group to all items on the questionnaire.

Since the PTA parents agreed to complete the survey questionnaire at PTA meetings, they admittedly represent a somewhat special group of all parents with school children. In an effort to determine whether there might be differences between the responses of these PTA parents and the responses of other parents, project staff conducted a telephone survey of non-PTA parents for comparison. In general, the responses of parents from both groups were quite similar. The differences between the groups are discussed later in this summary report.

The average response for all parents was used to tell which items in each section of the survey received the strongest positive or negative ratings. Tables were prepared to show those items. Comparisons between PTA and non-PTA parents responses were made to point out differences in their parent involvement attitudes or activities.

RESULTS

Results of this survey are presented in the following order. First, parent characteristics are presented as a way of looking at item responses. Then, the general pattern of responses to items is presented for each part of the questionnaire, starting with Part I and going through Part VI. The responses of PTA and non-PTA parents are compared to see if there were any differences in their attitudes toward parent involvement or in their level of participation. Tables of results are provided for each part. Results of examining item responses by personal or family traits are also discussed. Finally, a brief discussion is presented comparing the responses of parents to those of elementary school teachers and principals.

1. Characteristics of Respondents

Of the 2,035 PTA parents responding to the demographic questions (information about themselves and their families), 85.0% were female and 12.7% were male. Approximately 72.7% of respondents described themselves as being Anglo, 11.6% as Black and 10.9% as Hispanic. Single parents made up about 8.7% of those responding, with 88.4% describing themselves as being married with spouse living at home. Their ages ranged from less than 20 years to over 50, with 59.2% indicating they were between 30 and 39.

Respondents indicated having a range of 1 to 7+ children, 58% had either 1 or 2, and another 32.5% had either 3 or 4. Of the 2,033 parents responding to this item, 143 (6.8%) indicated they had more than 4 children. With regard to children's ages, 60.3% of the parents had children in grades K-3, 52.8% had children in grades 4-6 and another 37.5% had children in grades 7-12.

In terms of their educational level, 28.5% of the responding parents indicated they had completed high school, while an additional 31% had some college education, 19.4% had completed college and 11.6% reported having a graduate degree.

Over half of the PTA parents (55.2%) were from Texas, 12.1% from Louisiana, 10.6% from New Mexico, 9.4% from Mississippi, 7.3% from Oklahoma, and 5.3% from Arkansas. Of the 2,083 respondents, 1,102 (or 52.9%) indicated they lived in small cities (population less than 50,000), 32.6% lived in medium-size cities (population between 100,000 and 500,000) and 14.5% lived in large cities (population over 500,000).

Of the 99 non-PTA parents responding to the demographic items, 78.0% were female and 21.0% were male. Approximately 64.0% of respondents described themselves as Anglo, 18.0% as Black and 10.0% as Hispanic. Single parents made up approximately 20.0% of those responding, with 79.0% describing themselves as married with spouse living at home. Their ages ranged from 20 years old to over 50, with 56% indicating they were between the ages of 30 and 39.

Non-PTA parents reported having from 1 to 7+ children, with 52% indicating they had 1 or 2, and 42% indicating they had 3 or 4. Of 98 parents responding to this item, 4 indicated they had more than 4 children. As for the children's ages, 49% of non-PTA parents had children in grades K-3, 72% had children in grades 4-6 and another 41% had children in grades 7-12.

When asked about their educational level, 82 of the non-PTA parents indicated they had completed high school, and of this group, 33 indicated they had some college education, 13 said they had completed college and 11 reported having a graduate degree.

Comparison of PTA and non-PTA parent responses revealed many ways in which the two groups were alike. A majority of parents in both groups were white, married and living with spouse, had either one or two children, had a spouse working full time, and reported their educational level as being between finishing high school and finishing college.

The groups were different in that the non-PTA group had a somewhat larger percentage of males, of blacks, of single parents, and of people who worked full-time. Although these differences should be remembered when comparing the responses of the two groups, they do not seem to alter our general interpretation of parents' responses to the survey items.

2. Responses to Statements About Parent Involvement (Part I)

Part I of the survey presented 18 statements about parent involvement. Using a 4-point rating scale (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree), parents in the survey tended to agree with most items (see Table 1).

PTA parents (n = 2,083) agreed most strongly with statements that parents had a responsibility to make sure children completed their homework and to get themselves more involved in their child's school. They also strongly agreed that teachers should give them more ideas about helping their child with homework and that teachers should send more information home about classroom activities.

They disagreed most strongly with statements that parents have little effect on their child's academic success, that they didn't have time to be involved in school activities and that homework takes too much family time at home. They also disagreed with statements that teachers do not have the time to work with parents and that parents are not adequately trained to help make school decisions.

The responses from non-PTA parents were very much like those of PTA parents. PTA parents agreed somewhat more strongly than non-PTA parents with statements that they should take more responsibility for getting involved in their children's school, that they should make sure children did their homework, and that they generally felt comfortable when visiting the school. However, the non-PTA parents tended to agree more strongly

TABLE 1: PARENTS' AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS ABOUT PARENT INVOLVEMENT
(n = 2,083)

Statements	Parents' Response
1. Teachers should give me ideas about helping my children with homework.	Strongly Agreed
2. Teachers should be in charge of getting parents involved in the school.	Disagreed
3. Teachers have enough to do without also having to work with parents.	Disagreed
4. Teachers need to be trained for working with parents.	Agreed
5. Principals should be in charge of getting parents involved in the school.	Agreed
6. I want teachers to send more information home about classroom learning activities.	Strongly Agreed
7. I usually feel at ease when I visit the school.	Strongly Agreed
8. I have a hard time teaching some skills to my children (reading, math, etc.).	Agreed
9. I am not trained to help make school decisions.	Disagreed
10. I should make sure that my children do their homework.	Strongly Agreed
11. I do not have time to be involved in my children's activities at school.	Strongly Disagreed
12. I would help my children more with homework if I knew what to do.	Agreed
13. I should have the final word in decisions about my children's education.	Agreed
14. My children should have more homework.	Disagreed
15. I should be responsible for getting more involved in my children's school.	Strongly Agreed
16. I would help my children more with homework if I had more time.	Disagreed
17. I have little to do with my children's success in school.	Strongly Disagreed
18. Homework takes up too much family time at home.	Strongly Disagreed

with statements that they did not have enough time for school activities, and that they felt parents had little to do with their children's success in school.

3. Interest in Participating in School Decisions

When PTA parents were presented with 15 school decisions and asked to indicate how interested they were in taking part in each decision, a five-point rating scale was used in which 1 = definitely not interested, 2 = not interested, 3 = neutral, 4 = interested and 5 = definitely interested. The pattern of their responses is shown in Table 2.

The decisions in which parents were most interested included choosing classroom discipline methods and setting school behavior rules. They also indicated strong interest in deciding how much homework should be assigned and in evaluating how well children were learning. The decisions in which they showed the least interest were those about hiring and firing school staff. They also showed less interest in decisions about multicultural/bilingual education, teaching about sex roles, and desegregation plans.

Decisions in which non-PTA parents indicated the strongest interest were those related to classroom sex education, school behavior rules, classroom discipline methods, teaching about sex roles, and desegregation plans (see Table 3).

Non-PTA parents showed the least interest in decisions related to hiring and firing principals and teachers, selecting textbooks or materials, homework assignments, and budget decisions.

Comparison of PTA and non-PTA parents' responses shows that more of the PTA parents were interested in decisions about homework assignments, selecting textbooks, evaluating children's learning, hiring and firing school staff, rules for grading students, and setting school budget priorities. Both groups showed about the same level of interest in decisions related to classroom discipline, school behavior rules, placement in Special Education, and evaluating school staff. The non-PTA parents had more interest in the decisions about multicultural or bilingual education, sex role instruction, sex education and desegregation plans.

Although both groups of parents showed a high level of interest in decisions related to classroom discipline and school rules, PTA parents also showed a stronger interest in decisions about homework assignments, evaluating children's learning and making rules for grading. Non-PTA

TABLE 2: PARENTS' LEVEL OF INTEREST IN BEING INVOLVED IN SCHOOL DECISIONS
(n = 2,083)

Decisions	Parents' Response
1. Amount of homework assigned.	Most Interest
2. Choosing classroom discipline methods.	Most Interest
3. Selecting textbooks and other learning materials.	Strong Interest
4. Placing children in Special Education.	Strong Interest
5. Evaluating how well children are learning.	Most Interest
6. Hiring principal and teachers.	Mild Interest
7. Evaluating how well teachers do their jobs.	Strong Interest
8. Deciding what's most important for the school budget.	Strong Interest
9. Firing principal and teachers.	Mild Interest
10. Having more multicultural/bilingual education in the children's learning.	Mild Interest
11. Making school desegregation plans.	Strong Interest
12. Setting school behavior rules.	Most Interest
13. More classroom teaching about sex roles.	Strong Interest
14. Setting rules for how children are graded.	Strong Interest
15. More classroom teaching about sex education.	Strong Interest

TABLE 3: NON-PTA PARENTS' LEVEL OF INTEREST IN BEING INVOLVED IN SCHOOL DECISIONS
(n = 2,083)

Decisions	Parents' Response
1. Amount of homework assigned.	Strong Interest
2. Choosing classroom discipline methods.	Most Interest
3. Selecting textbooks and other learning materials.	Strong Interest
4. Placing children in Special Education.	Strong Interest
5. Evaluating how well children are learning.	Strong Interest
6. Hiring principal and teachers.	Least Interest
7. Evaluating how well teachers do their jobs.	Strong Interest
8. Deciding what's most important for the school budget.	Strong Interest
9. Firing principal and teachers.	Least Interest
10. Having more multicultural/bilingual education in the children's learning.	Strong Interest
11. Making school desegregation plans.	Most Interest
12. Setting school behavior rules.	Most Interest
13. More classroom teaching about sex roles.	Most Interest
14. Setting rules for how children are graded.	Strong Interest
15. More classroom teaching about sex education.	Most Interest

parents, however, showed a stronger interest in decisions about desegregation, bilingual education, sex education and sex role instruction. Finally, the decisions about hiring and firing school staff were the only decisions in which less than half of either PTA or non-PTA parents showed an interest.

4. Interest in Parent Involvement Roles

In this part of the questionnaire, PTA parents were presented with 7 parent involvement roles and were asked to tell how much they personally would be interested in each role. Parents responded to this part of the questionnaire using the same 5-point rating scale, where 1 = definitely not interested and 5 = definitely interested.

PTA parents showed an interest in all 7 roles, as shown in Table 4. None of the roles were given a rating below 3.0, but the least desired role was that of Paid School Staff.

In general, PTA parents showed the strongest interest in the traditional roles of Audience for school activities, Home Tutor for their own children, and School Program Supporter. However, this group was also strongly interested in being Advocates in the schools, Co-learners with school staff, and Decision Makers in the schools.

When non-PTA parents were asked to indicate how much they personally would be interested in each role, they also had a generally positive interest in the roles.

Comparison of the two groups' responses to each role revealed that non-PTA parents had greater interest than PTA parents in the role of Home Tutor, but less interest in all 6 of the other roles.

5. Participation in Specific Parent Involvement Activities

In this section, PTA parents were asked to look at 24 specific parent involvement activities and to indicate how much they personally participated in each. A response scale was used in which 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, and 4 = often. Parent responses to these items suggested that they do not take part in these activities very much (see Table 5).

The activities in which PTA parents most often participated included going to open house or special programs at the school, helping their children with homework, and going to parent teacher conferences about their children's progress. The other activities in which parents often took part included visiting the school and going to PTA meetings.

TABLE 4: PARENTS' RATINGS OF INTEREST IN SELECTING PARENT INVOLVEMENT ROLES
(n = 2,083)*

Roles	Parents' Response
1. Paid School Staff - work in the school as an aide, parent educator, assistant teacher, assistant librarian, or other such jobs.	Mild Interest
2. School Program Supporter - coming to the school to assist in events; for example, chaperoning a party or field trip, taking tickets at a fund-raising dinner, or such activities.	Most Interest
3. Home Tutor - helping your children at home with school work or other educational activities.	Most Interest
4. Audience - supporting your child in school, for example, by going to school performances, baking for bake sales, responding to notices from the school, etc.	Most Interest
5. Advocate - meeting with school board or other officials to ask for changes in rules or practices in the school or school system.	Strong Interest
6. Co-Learner - going to classes or workshops with teachers and principals where everyone learns more about children and education.	Strong Interest
7. Decision Maker - being on an advisory board, a school committee, or governing board; or by giving your opinions to these boards or committees.	Strong Interest

TABLE 5: PARENTS' REPORTED PARTICIPATION IN SPECIFIC PARENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES
(n = 2,083)

Activities	Parents' Response
1. Working as full time paid staff, for example, teacher, librarian, teacher aide, cafeteria help, etc.	Seldom
2. Helping children with homework.	Often
3. Visiting the school to see what is happening.	Often
4. Going to "open house" or special programs at school.	Often
5. Going to classes at the school which help you teach your children at home.	Sometimes
6. Helping with school activities such as coffees, pot-luck suppers, fund raising, etc.	Often
7. Helping teachers with classroom learning activities, for example, story telling, reading, math games, etc.	Sometimes
8. Helping in the school, for example, the library, reading center, playground, lunchroom, nurse's office, etc.	Sometimes
9. Going with children and teachers on school field trips or picnics, or to parties.	Often
10. Going to workshops or other such educational activities for parents at the school.	Sometimes
11. Organizing parent volunteer activities.	Sometimes
12. Taking part in PTA meetings.	Seldom
13. Planning the school budget.	Seldom
14. Helping to plan what will be taught in the school.	Seldom
15. Helping children learn through the use of educational materials at home, for example, games, magazines, books, etc.	Often

Table 5 (Continued)

Activities	Parents' Response
16. Taking children to places of educational interest, for example, museums, libraries, art galleries, etc.	Often
17. Working to improve the schools through community groups such as neighborhood associations, church organizations, LULAC, NAACP, etc.	Sometimes
18. Helping decide how well school programs work (like Title I, Follow Through, ESAA, etc.)	Seldom
19. Working as part time paid staff, for example, assistant teacher, room clerk, nurse, health aide, etc.	Seldom
20. Helping to decide how well teachers and principals do their jobs.	Seldom
21. Helping to hire or fire teachers and principals.	Seldom
22. Going to parent/teacher conferences about your child's progress.	Often
23. Giving ideas to the school board or school administration for making changes.	Sometimes
24. Going to meeting of the school board.	Sometimes

The activities in which PTA parents reported the least participation included helping to hire or fire school staff, working as part-time staff or aides at the school, and evaluating how well teachers or principals are doing their jobs. They also indicated that they did not often help to plan what would be taught in the school, and that only a few worked as full time school staff.

Non-PTA parents were also asked to look at each of 24 specific parent involvement activities and to indicate how much they took part using a 5-point scale in which 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often and 5 = always. This response scale differs slightly from the scale used in the PTA parents' questionnaire.

Although a different response scale was used in the telephone survey, the pattern of the non-PTA parents' responses was very similar to that of PTA parents. Activities in which non-PTA parents indicated the most frequent participation included going to parent/teacher conferences, helping children with homework, attending open house at school, helping children with educational materials at home, and taking children to places of educational interest. PTA parents reported most frequently taking part in many of the same activities.

Activities in which non-PTA parents showed the least frequent participation included working as part-time school staff, helping to hire or fire teachers or principals, planning the school budget, helping to plan the school curriculum, and working as full-time staff in the school.

6. Suggestions for Improving Parent Involvement Efforts

Both groups of parents were given a list of 10 suggestions for improving parent involvement in schools, and they were asked to indicate which of these they thought would work best. They used a 5-point scale on which a response of 1 = definitely would not work, 2 = probably would not work, 3 = neutral, 4 = probably would work, and 5 = definitely would work.

The PTA parents felt most in favor of such activities as making parents feel more welcome at school, giving parents more information about the child's successes in school, helping parents understand the subjects being taught, and schools offering more activities which include children, parents and teachers together.

The responses of non-PTA parents to these suggestions was very similar to those of PTA parents. The non-PTA parents did, however, feel more

TABLE 6: PTA AND NON-PTA PARENTS' RESPONSES TO SUBBESTIONS FOR IMPROVING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

Suggestions	PTA Parents (n=2,083)	Non-PTA Parents (n=100)
1. Sending more information to parents about ways they could be involved.	Favored	Favored
2. Making parents feel more welcome in the school.	Strongly Favored	Strongly Favored
3. Helping parents to better understand the subjects being taught.	Strongly Favored	Strongly Favored
4. Having informal meetings or activities where parents and school staff can get to know each other better.	Favored	Favored
5. Asking parents in what ways they would like to be involved.	Favored	Favored
6. Giving parents activities they can do at home with their children.	Favored	Favored
7. Helping students understand that having their parents involved is important.	Favored	Strongly Favored
8. Giving parents more information about children's success in school.	Strongly Favored	Strongly Favored
9. Planning more school activities at times when working parents can come.	Favored	Strongly Favored
10. Having more activities which include children, parents and teachers.	Strongly Favored	Favored

strongly that parent involvement would be better if more school activities were planned at times when working parents could come (see Table 6).

7. Reasons Why Parent Involvement Is Less in High School

PTA parents were given one section of items that was left off the telephone survey of non-PTA parents. This section was made up of 10 statements describing reasons why parents may become less involved in schools at the junior high or high school level. Using the same 4-point scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree, PTA parents agreed most strongly that parents are less involved at the high school level because teachers do not ask parents to be involved, parents may not understand the courses their children take in high school, there are not as many parent-teacher conferences, and there are fewer PTA activities for high school parents.

The reasons they rated as least likely to cause a lower level of parent involvement in high school included more distance to the schools, too many teachers for parents to talk to, not enough time for both school activities and work, and being unable to leave younger children at home. PTA parents' responses to these items are shown in Table 7.

8. Comparing Parent Interest with Participation in School Activities

The parent survey was designed to allow a comparison between parents' reported interest in various types of parent involvement and how much they participated in such activities. Parents were asked to tell how much interest they had in 7 parent involvement roles, they were then asked to tell how much they took part in 24 specific activities. The 24 activities were selected to correspond to the 7 roles.

Comparison of PTA parents' interest with their participation suggests that, in general, their participation lags far behind their interest. The reasons for this lag are not clear, but some interesting patterns do emerge. For example, parents reported more frequently taking part in activities related to the roles in which they showed the most interest. These activities corresponded to the parent involvement roles of Audience, Home Tutor, and School Program Supporter. However, the activities which received low ratings were all activities which related to the roles of Decision Maker and Paid School Staff.

An interesting split was also seen in the responses to activities corresponding to the role of School Program Supporter: parents reported

TABLE 7: RANK ORDER OF REASONS WHY PARENTS BECOME LESS INVOLVED AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL
(n = 2,083)

Rank	Reasons	Parents' Response
1	Teachers don't ask parents to be involved in school as much.	Strongly Agreed
2	Parents may not understand some of the courses taken in high school.	Strongly Agreed
3	There are not as many parent/teacher conferences.	Agreed
4	There are not as many PTA activities for high school parents.	Agreed
5	Parents do not have time to be involved in school activities and work at the same time.	Agreed
6	Children do not want their parents involved when they get to high school.	Agreed
7	Parents can't leave smaller children at home.	Disagreed
8	High school principals do not encourage parent involvement in the school.	Disagreed
9	There are too many teachers to talk to.	Disagreed
10	The schools are too far away.	Strongly Disagreed

participating more frequently in PTA meetings, helping with such school activities as fund-raisers or pot-luck suppers, and going to field trips, picnics and parties. They reported less frequent participation in helping teachers with classroom learning activities, helping in the school library, reading center, or playground, and organizing parent volunteer activities.

When parents' participation in the activities was compared to their interest in the related parent involvement roles, the difference was much smaller between the activities corresponding to the roles of Audience, and for Home Tutor, and much larger for activities related to the role of Decision Maker. This comparison of scores suggested that parents not only are more interested in the traditional parent involvement roles of Audience and Home Tutor, but also they participated more frequently in activities related to those roles.

Many of the same comparisons were made with data collected from non-PTA parents in the phone survey. Like the PTA parents, these parents indicated they more frequently took part in activities related to the roles in which they showed the most interest. The activities which received highest ratings were those related to the parent involvement roles of Audience and Home Tutor. In contrast, the activities which received lowest ratings were activities related to the other five roles. For the non-PTA parents, there was also a split in their responses to activities related to the role of School Program Supporter; they more frequently took part in PTA meetings, school activities such as fund-raisers or pot-luck suppers, and field trips, picnics and parties; they less frequently helped teachers with classroom learning activities, helped in the school library, reading center, or playground, and organized parent volunteer activities.

When their participation in the activities was compared to their interest in related parent involvement roles, the differences were smallest for the activities corresponding to the roles of Audience and of Home Tutor. The differences were greatest for the roles of Co-Learner and of Decision Maker. This pattern suggested that non-PTA parents were also more interested in the traditional parent involvement roles of Audience and Home Tutor, and actually took part more frequently in activities corresponding to those roles. They were less interested in the other five roles and reported much less participation in related activities.

9. Breaking Down Parents' Responses

For each part of the questionnaire, responses to individual items were analyzed by parent characteristics. These analyses showed that for PTA parents:

1. Parent interest in the 7 parent involvement roles was not strongly related to their level of educational achievement.

2. Parent interest in roles and in being involved in school decisions did not vary according to whether they or their spouse were working full time, part time or unemployed.

3. Parent participation in school activities did not vary according to family size, but was somewhat less for those parents who were working full time.

4. Attitudes and behaviors related to parent involvement did not seem to be related in any way to family ethnic background.

Other analyses suggested that although full time employment may have influenced how parents responded to some of the items, the influence was fairly weak, and probably not meaningful when compared to the influence of other factors, such as size of the school or experiences with school personnel.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This study was designed to look at parents' attitudes toward parent involvement issues; to determine their level of interest in helping to make various school decisions; to discover which parent involvement roles they prefer; and to see how they think parent involvement might be improved. The survey also asked them why parents tend to become less involved in high school than in elementary school.

1. Summary of Parent Survey Results

Parents in this survey showed strong support for parent involvement in education. Their responses indicated that most of them accepted responsibility for seeing that children do their homework and for getting more involved in their children's school activities. They generally reported feeling at ease visiting the schools, wanting teachers to provide them with more ideas about helping their children at home, and wanting teachers to provide more information about children's classroom learning activities. They indicated they would help their children more if they knew what to do. They also felt that parents should have the final say in decisions about their children's education, and that teachers needed to be trained for

working with parents. They even generally agreed that their children should have more homework. The majority of both PTA and non-PTA parents indicated they knew their involvement was important for their children's school success, and they had time for parent involvement activities.

Parents' responses to items asking about their interest in participating in school decisions, showed the most interest in those decisions which seemed most directly related to their own children--choosing classroom discipline methods, deciding how much homework should be assigned, setting school behavior rules, evaluating student progress, and placing children in Special Education. They indicated less interest in those decisions which seemed related to school administration or governance -- hiring and firing school personnel, evaluating their job performance, and setting budget priorities for the school.

Likewise, the way in which they responded to items asking about their preference among parent involvement roles indicated the strongest interest was in the parent roles which were most immediately related to their child and their child's classroom--Audience, School Supporter and Home Tutor. However, parents also indicated a strong interest in the roles which involve sharing in some of the school's decision making.

Parents' description of their activities showed that they more often participated in activities which related primarily to their own child, and which corresponded to the traditional ways in which parents have been involved in the schools--helping children with homework, attending parent-teacher conferences, going to open house activities at the school, helping with such school activities as pot-luck suppers or fund-raisers, and attending PTA meetings. Again, the activities which were reported as least frequent by parents were those which related to participation in school administrative or policy decisions.

When asked how best to improve parent involvement, parents indicated that they thought almost anything would help. They most favored the suggestions that school personnel try to make parents feel more welcome in the school and that school staff provide parents with more information about their children's school successes. They least favored sending parents additional information about ways they could become more involved and sending home activities for parents to do with their children. But even these least-favored suggestions received high ratings, indicating that

parents thought they might help improve parent involvement.

Parents indicated why they thought parent involvement decreases at the high school level in the final section of the survey. In general, they saw this decreased involvement as mainly due to the fact that no one asks parents to participate as much. There are fewer parent-teacher conferences, high school principals do not encourage parent involvement, teachers do not ask parents to be involved in school as much, and there are fewer PTA activities. Lack of time, distance from school and difficulty finding a baby sitter for younger children were not seen as major problems for parent involvement, although they may present problems to some parents.

The information gathered is valuable data for those interested in improving parent involvement. Even more importantly, the questions asked of parents in this study are similar to questions already answered by both elementary school teachers and elementary school principals. The design of these three surveys allows us to compare the attitudes, preferences, and actual practices of all three groups. This comparison of responses identified topics where there is agreement across all three groups as well as those areas where there is disagreement.

2. Comparison of Survey Results from Teachers, Principals, and Parents

A major goal of the parent survey was to determine whether parents agreed with school staff about the role of parents in education. The survey asked parents how interested they were in both the roles most favored by school personnel and in other, less traditional roles.

There was agreement among the three groups on 10 of the 15 statements. They all indicated the strongest agreement with statements that parents should make sure their children do their homework, and that teachers should provide parents with more ideas about helping their children with homework. They also agreed that parents want more information sent home about classroom learning activities, that a course in working with parents should be required of undergraduates in elementary education, that parents would help children at home if they knew what to do, and that principals should be responsible for parents taking a more active role in the schools.

Respondents from all three groups most strongly disagreed with statements that parent involvement has little to do with pupil success, teachers have enough to do without also having to work with parents, and parents are

unwilling to spend time on their children's education.

Differing views among the three groups were found in their responses to several statements. Teachers and principals tended to agree that teachers should take the initiative to get parents involved in education and that parents do not have the necessary training to participate in school decisions; parents tended to disagree with these statements. Teachers and principals disagreed with statements that parents are usually comfortable coming to the school, and that parents should have the final word in educational decisions affecting their children; but parents tended to agree with these statements. Teachers and parents agreed with the statement that parent involvement should be the responsibility of parents, while principals tended to disagree.

Each of the three groups were also asked to rate parent involvement in specific school decisions. Teachers and principals were asked to indicate how useful it would be to have parents involved in each of the decisions. Parents were then asked to indicate whether they were even interested in participating in these same decisions.

Teachers and principals tended to rate parent participation in these school decisions as not useful. In contrast, parents responded to all of these decisions with a high rating, indicating they were interested in participating in all of them. Although they indicated a stronger interest in the decisions which might affect their own children directly, such as homework assignments and school discipline, they generally expressed a strong interest in being part of curriculum and instruction decisions as well as those related to the administration and governance of the schools.

Parents generally indicated a strong interest in being involved in the 15 school decisions, while teachers and principals generally indicated they felt parent involvement in these decisions would not be useful. This pattern suggests that parents would become more involved in these decisions if there were opportunities for them to do so. However, the responses of teachers and principals indicated that they generally do not favor providing parents with those opportunities. This suggests that parent involvement in school decisions, or the sharing of such decisions is more likely to fail because of the actions of school staff rather than parents being disinterested.

Each of the three groups were also asked to rate the 7 parent involvement roles. Principals and teachers were asked to rate the importance of having parents in these various roles. Parents were asked to indicate how interested they were in playing each of the roles.

For the role of Decision Maker, teachers and principals responded with negative ratings while parents gave it a rather high positive rating. In fact, it should be noted that 939 parents (45.8% of those responding) indicated they were definitely interested in playing the role of Decision Maker, and another 617 (30.1%) said they were probably interested. Over 75% of the parents responding showed a positive interest in this role.

Teachers and principals most favored parent involvement in the roles of Audience and School Program Supporter, the traditional ways in which parents have been involved in the schools. Parents most strongly favored the roles of Audience, Home Tutor, and School Program Supporter, but they also gave high ratings to the roles of Advocate, Co-Learner and Decision Maker, indicating high interest in these non-traditional parent roles.

In summary, parents tended to respond more positively to each of the parent involvement roles than did either teachers or principals, which provided additional evidence of the strong interest of parents in becoming more involved in their children's education.

Finally, parents, teachers and principals were also asked to respond to 24 specific activities related to parent involvement in education. Parents were asked to tell how much they took part in these activities; principals and teachers were asked to tell whether or not these activities were typical in their schools.

For all three groups there was general agreement about which activities represented current practices in the schools at this time. The activities which represent the more traditional roles of parents in the schools were seen by all three groups as the most typical. These activities relate to the roles of Home Tutor, Audience, and School Program Supporter. The activities which generally relate to the roles of Co-Learner or Advocate were seen as less typical in the schools. However, the least typical activities for parents were those which generally correspond to the role of Decision Maker.

In summary, parents responding to this survey indicated a much stronger level of support for parent involvement overall than did teachers

and principals. However, parents' views about increased involvement were similar to those expressed by both teachers and principals. These results are evidence that the slow progress in parent involvement is not due to parents' apathy or disinterest. Surveyed parents indicated a high level of interest in the parent involvement roles which centered upon their own children as well as those related to the governance and administration of the schools.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary purpose of this study has been to provide information from three groups having an interest in parent involvement in education -- parents, teachers, and principals. The information gathered so far consists of each group's attitudes towards the idea of parent involvement, attitudes towards specific roles which parents might play, attitudes towards parent participation in specific school decisions, and their description of current practices involving parents in education.

In general, each group indicated its support for the concept of having parents involved in education. Although there were members in each group who were not sure about parent involvement, most responded positively.

The differences of opinion among these three groups regarding the value of the different types of parent involvement, indicate that there may be resistance to greater parent involvement, but this resistance may be predominantly that which comes from teachers and principals. In addition, this resistance may be greater if the specific parent involvement effort involves giving parents equal status with school staff. If the parent involvement effort focuses upon involving parents in support or subordinate roles, teachers and principals may be less resistant, but some parents may choose not to participate.

These results show how each type of parent involvement relates to specific parent involvement goals. For example, if the goal of parent involvement is to improve student conduct and student achievement, the type of parent involvement might be basically that of Home Tutor; teachers would provide parents with ideas about working at home with their children on school assignments or on improving their behavior. However, if the goal is to engage parents in the governance of the schools as a way of building community support for school efforts, the type of parent involvement might be that of Decision Maker; parents and school staff would work as equals to

develop plans or policies for the schools.

Another part of the results which has major importance is the large difference between support for the idea of parent involvement and actual practices in the schools. For each group surveyed--parents, teachers, and principals--the level of support for the general concept of parent involvement and for the specific parent involvement roles seems much higher than the reported level of actual practices. This pattern raises the question of why parent involvement activities are not more common, particularly since these three groups all seem to favor them.

This survey of parents, and the comparison of survey results with those obtained from elementary school principals and teachers, has shown the importance of developing a better understanding of the various types of parent involvement. This understanding should include such issues as the number of different types of parent involvement, the relationship between parent involvement and educational policies, the selection of specific parent involvement goals, the selection of strategies appropriate to those goals, and the opposition each strategy is likely to encounter.

These surveys also have provided a clear direction for future research in this area. To supplement the data collected from parents, teachers and principals, future research should begin to describe the combinations of federal, state, and local educational policies which shape all parent involvement efforts. A complete description of educational policies and the views of those who make the policies would provide important information about the barriers to increased parent involvement. This information might also help in identifying state and local efforts which seem to offer the most help potential for parent involvement in the public schools.